

“It” will send shivers down your spine

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: ««« out of 4 stars

Running Time: 135 min.

It has only been a few weeks since a Stephen King adaptation has been at cinemas. *The Dark Tower* came and went without much fanfare or success. However, the horror film *It* seems likely to fare much better with audiences and bring in stronger box office returns. Previously produced as a popular miniseries, the new feature updates the story and adds gruesome and disturbing turns too violent for network television. But does the end result send chills down the spine?

For most, the answer will be yes. In fact, this feature excels at maximizing the creep factor out of its supernatural lead antagonist, an ancient and evil life form known as Pennywise (Bill Skarsgård). Every 27 years in a small town in the state of Maine, the monster comes out of hibernation to terrify and devour children, often using the guise of a clown. The movie begins in 1989, where a new group of young outcasts find themselves targeted by the creature and must do everything they can to survive the onslaught.

Those familiar with the book will know that the events are set over two separate time periods. However, this movie only tackles the first half of the novel, dealing exclusively with the characters as children and their early encounters with Pennywise. In some respects, it's a wise move, allowing several of the characters a chance to be more developed than they might have been in a more condensed version. The roles of Bill (Jaeden Lieberher), Ben (Jeremy Ray

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Taylor) and Beverly (Sophia Lillis) are given the most emphasis and make the biggest impressions. However, while given much less to work with, the young supporting cast still come across as agreeable and likable.

As with many horror movies, the villain is as important as the heroes. The latest take on Pennywise is certainly chilling, even if some viewers may wonder about the character’s motives and reasoning for not being more aggressive at certain points in the film. Still, CGI technology allows this version to morph disturbingly. It also chases and hunts the kids in a more blunt and physical manner than in the previous version, at times twisting its body around or moving in strange and unnatural ways. Several early attack scenes work well, including a bit with a character being chased through a library. Still, the antagonist’s sewer grate introduction is the film’s highlight and most unsettling sequence.

There’s a real attempt to follow the book as closely as possible here, which does lead to a few story issues. This movie features seven youngsters as its leads and that’s an awful lot of people to deal with. It also means that all of the kids have to encounter Pennywise individually before teaming up. So, even though the scare scenes are effectively rendered, it does become repetitive to see similar variations on a theme occur again and again. Ultimately, this slows the pacing down. And all of the adults in the film come across as utterly horrible, one-note caricatures; they could have used a little more nuance and subtlety.

The filmmakers also have no reservations about throwing the clown on screen as much as possible. He isn’t hidden in shadow and often comes running right at the characters and camera, sometimes extending his jaw for further effect. However, after a time, these actions become less and less frightening and his toothy mouth less disturbing. One could argue that it may be to mirror the emotions of the kids and their growing bravery and response to the threat, but it seems like he’s revealed a bit too frequently.

Still, this horror movie does work well, even if it’s a little longer than it needs to be and appears to be saving the answers to some of its deeper questions for another installment. The flick provides the required scares and will likely be a huge success (guests at the screening I attended were fully enraptured in the proceedings). *It* has some minor problems and isn’t the best King adaptation to ever hit cinemas. Yet it is a solid creeper that should leave fans and general audiences welcoming the inevitable sequel/resolution.

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